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ABSTRACT

The Southwestern Pennsylvania Area Labor-Management Committee (SPALMC), which serves approximately 180 adult students annually, was experiencing inconsistencies in performance among its adult education staff. The problems included teachers arriving late 50% of the time and individualizing instruction only 70% of the time. To remedy these problems, the SPALMC undertook an action research project consisting of development of a teaching policy manual and delivery of staff inservice training. First, existing performance problems were documented through field observations and a student survey. Next, a procedural manual for SPALMC's instructors was developed that covered start times for full- and part-time instructors, proper student intake procedures, and development of individualized lessons for students. The new manuals were discussed with all SPALMC instructors, and instructors were offered additional materials and training on planning individualized instruction. Field observations, conducted at the end of the project, confirmed that the new manual and staff training had resulted in a 45% improvement in teacher performance. (Attachments constituting approximately 60% of this document contain the following four items: instructor arrival time log form; student questionnaire; overview of the instructor handbook's contents; and information about the SPALMC's Department of Education and full-time instructors.) (MN)

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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PRODUCT

"Pennsylvania Action Research Network:
Staff Development Through
Six Professional Development Centers"

Project Number 099-99-9010
July 1998-June 1999

Project Director
Dr. Gary Kuhne
Assistant Professor and Regional Director of Adult Education
The Pennsylvania State University

Note: Action Research is a process of systematic inquiry credited to Kurt Lewin who popularized it in the U.S. in the 1940"s. Today it is considered a system of qualitative research. Typical of action research, none of the individual projects in this monograph series claims to have generalizable application beyond the specific project described. However, each monograph report can serve to be illustrative, instructive and provides the potential for replication in other locations. For a level of generalizability, it is recommended that the reader seek common patterns in the monograph reports in this series, and the wider literature, or contact the Action Research Network for assistance in this.

I. ABSTRACT

The Adult Education Services of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Area Labor-Management Committee (SPALMC) has experienced inconsistencies in performance among its Adult Education staff. SPALMC's Adult Education staff has been told verbally what is considered proper policy however no written policies exist.

SPALMC's Adult Education Services offers ABE and GED classes at several locations throughout Beaver County. Instructors report directly to class sites and are expected to be at their site at set times.

Observation of instructors prior to intervention revealed that instructors arrived late to their class sites 50% of the time. Student questionnaires revealed that instructors were using individualized instruction 70% of the time.

The intervention will consist of written policies and staff in-service training. Data collection strategies consisted of student questionnaires, logs, and document analysis.

Following the implementation of the policy manual and in-service training instructors were on time for class 95% of the time and using individualized instruction 100% of the time.

II. PROBLEM

The Southwestern Pennsylvania Area Labor-Management Committee is located in Monaca, PA. We offer ABE/GED classes throughout Beaver County and serve approximately 180 students per year. I serve SPALMC as the Senior Education/Training Specialist. I was assigned this position in July 1998. It is my responsibility to assure the Adult Education Department is operating as required by the Pennsylvania Department of Education guidelines as well as SPALMC's administrative policies.

The problems we have experienced may be the result of several years of poor communication among SPALMC administration and Adult Education staff. It is clear that instructors have always followed their own schedule and their own procedures when in the classroom. No formal instructor policies or evaluations have ever been developed or utilized. Areas of concern are employee start times and instructor procedures in the classroom (specifically, intake procedures and using individualized instruction).

The improvement of these areas would assure that employees are working the designated

hours and the time schedule they are being paid for. Improvement of intake procedures and the use of individualized instruction would assure that students are receiving proper instruction based on meaningful intake procedures. Consistencies in these areas will also ease transition of students who may need to change class locations or times.

III. PLANNING

The plan of intervention I will use consists of developing a procedure manual for SPALMC's instructors. This manual will outline expectations of the instructors in areas such as required start time for full time and part time employees. The manual will also provide explanation of required intake procedures and the proper use of individualized instruction. Upon developing the manual I will conduct in-service training with current SPALMC instructors utilizing the manual. Topics will include employee start times, proper intake procedures and developing individualized lessons for students. Each instructor will be required to sign an in-service sheet stating they understand the policies/procedures. If further training is needed I will provide that training or contact the Northwest Professional Development Center to see what is available. The proposed intervention plan will take approximately four months. During this project I will use questionnaires, document analysis, and logs to collect data.

A baseline will be established by conducting interviews of students to establish the current intake procedures. I will also observe instructor arrival times to establish the rate of instructor tardiness.

The criteria for success following the implementation of the procedure manual/instructor handbook will be: 1. Teachers will work the required hours of the position and be on time for class 100% of the time; 2. Intake procedures will be conducted according to the manual 95% of the time; and 3. Students will receive individualized instruction 95% of the time.

Possible constraints may consist of a lack of observation time and an inability to contact students for an interview. It will be necessary to have approval of SPALMC's executive director in conducting teacher observations and developing the manual.

I contacted the Resource Specialist at the AdvancE State Literacy Resource Center in Harrisburg who provided me with several publications. The most useful to me in developing a manual is the Adult Programs Employee Handbook developed by the ARIN IU 28 Regional

Educational Service Agency. I will be able to use this manual and adapt several policies and formats to my project.

Will the implementation of a procedure manual improve teacher performance by reducing inconsistencies in student intake, increasing individualized instruction in the classroom, and eliminating instructor tardiness?

IV. ACTION

Following my observations of instructor arrival times, student interviews, and document analysis I met with each instructor individually. In February 1999 I discussed the reasoning and results of my observations, interviews and document analysis. After discussing the results with each instructor, I discussed the new instructor handbook. These policies were developed in addition to SPALMC administrative policies in order to address areas specific to the Adult Education Department. I discussed the areas of concern and offered materials to use when planning for individualized instruction. I also made each instructor aware that more training is available if they were interested.

Problems that occurred during the project were minor. For example, instructor excuses for being late for class or for not using individualized instruction, including the excuse that that is how we have always done things". I addressed this problem with the understanding that the idea of doing something different can be frightening to someone who has, for years, always done the same thing without ever being asked to do anything differently.

V. RESULTS

The first stage of data collection took place prior to implementing the instructor's handbook and with approval from the executive director. I conducted observations of instructors' arrival times at their assigned class sites. I kept a record of the start times in a log for two months (Attachment 1). The observations revealed that instructors were late for class 50% of the time. During this same two-month period I developed a student questionnaire (Attachment 2). I randomly chose students from each class site and called them on the telephone. I asked the same questions to each student I made contact with. These questionnaires revealed that student intake procedures were being followed 98% of the time. The questionnaires also revealed that students

were receiving individualized instruction 70% of the time. These percentages were higher than I expected and proved that intake procedures were being followed consistently.

Following this phase of data collection I developed the instructor handbook (Attachment 3). I used this manual to discuss proper procedures with instructors and to provide some materials and training on individualized instruction.

The second stage of data collection was conducted following the implementation of the procedure manual. I followed the same data collection strategies as I did in stage one. This time teacher observations revealed that instructors were on time for class 95% of the time. This is a 45% improvement over my prior observations. Although I stated that the criterion for success is 100% I am very pleased with the improvement. In addition, data also revealed that individualized instruction is taking place 100% of the time. This is a 30% improvement and coincides with the established criteria for success. This second stage of data collection leads me to believe that the intervention I used was successful. Instructors have shown improvement in each of the problem areas.

VI. REFLECTION

I am very pleased with the results of this project and I would not do anything differently. I am certain that this project has had a positive impact on our program. It has assisted me to put the problems we were having into perspective and plan the best action to take.

Attachment 1

Log #1 Instructor Arrival Times

Instructor A (8:00 am start time)

Date

Location

Arrival Time

Instructor B (5:30 pm start time)

Date

Location

Arrival Time

Attachment 2

Confidential Student Questionnaire

Class Site:

Month of Enrollment:

1. How were you greeted the first time you entered the classroom?

2. Did the instructor introduce you to the other members of the class?

3. Did the instructor explain the forms you filled out?

4. Did the instructor explain the results of the pretest you took?

5. Did the instructor answer any questions you had?

6. Did the instructor discuss a plan with you on what you may need to study in class?

7. Do you feel that you are working at a pace that is good for you?

8. Are you given materials that focus on what you need to learn, different from others in the class?

9. Is there anything you would like to see done differently in the class?

10. Do you have any questions?

Attachment 3

The Southwestern Pennsylvania Area Labor-Management Committee's Adult Education Services Instructor Handbook

Philosophy
The Southwestern Pennsylvania Area Labor-Management Committee's Adult Education Department operates on the philosophy that learning is a lifelong process that enhances and enriches lives. It is our purpose to provide the support and services that adults need in order to be successful in their educational or employment endeavors. Quality instruction, academic counseling, and referral to community agencies make this possible.

Purpose
The purpose of this handbook is to provide the Adult Education Services staff with more specific description of job duties and requirements of GED instructors. This handbook is not meant as a substitute for or replacement of any policies established by SPALMC administration.

Department of Education Organizational Chart

Class Schedule and Assignments
Monday, Wednesday, Friday
9:00 am to 12:00 pm College Hill United Methodist Church, Beaver Falls
Richard 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm Ambridge Job Center

Tuesday, Thursday
1:00 pm to 4:00 pm IBEW Hall, Vanport

Tuesday, Thursday
Eileen
9: 00 am to 12:00 pm YMCA, New Brighton

Tuesday, Thursday
Ray
5:30 pm to 8:30 pm

Full Time Instructors
Full time instructors are required to work 40 hours per week. Start time for full time instructors is 8:00 am. Instructors teaching morning classes should report to the class site at 8: 00 am Morning classes are to run from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm. Afternoon classes should run from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm. Any necessary schedule changes should be approved by the Executive Director.

Donna Nedelk Boyer
(8 Hours- PT)
Executive Director

Eileen Madgar
(40 Hours - FT)
Senior Education/Training Specialist
Department Chair

Richard Carland
(40 Hours - FT)
Education/Training Specialist

Raymon Smith
(10 Hours - PT)
Education/Training Specialist

Barbara Colwell
(16 Hours - PT)
Training/Outreach Specialist

Paula Hart
(12 Hours - PT)
Administrative Assistant/Secretary